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WASHINGTON, DC- U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon voted tonight to raise the federal minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25 an hour over two years. H.R. 5970, which passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 230 to 180, now heads to the Senate for approval.

"Americans who put in a hard day's work should not still live in poverty in the richest nation in the world," said Melancon. **"As a former small-business owner, I understand how hard it is to keep your head above water. Nonetheless, it is impossible for anyone to make ends meet on \$5.15 an hour - just \$10,700 a year for a fulltime worker - and I applaud my colleagues in the House for finally giving hard-working Americans a raise."**

Of the 6.6 million workers who earn minimum wage, 71 percent (4.7 million) are adults over the age of 20. Because the minimum wage hasn't been increased in nine years, it is the lowest it has been in fifty years, when adjusted for inflation. If the minimum wage was equal to what it was at its highest point in 1968, it would be \$9.05 per hour. In 2005, the average corporate CEO in America was paid 821 times as much as a minimum wage earner -- earning more before lunchtime on the very first day at work than a minimum wage worker earns all year.

The bill also contains extends a number of tax deductions and credits until the end of calendar year 2007, including: the bonus depreciation for certain qualified Gulf Opportunity Zone property; the education tax deduction to help students go to college; tax deductions for teacher's classroom expenses; the Indian employment tax credit; the work opportunity tax credit and welfare-to-work credit (combined and slightly modified); and the deduction of state and local sales taxes. In addition, H.R. 5970 permanently reduces the death tax by increasing the exemption to \$5 million per individual and \$10 million per couple.

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